

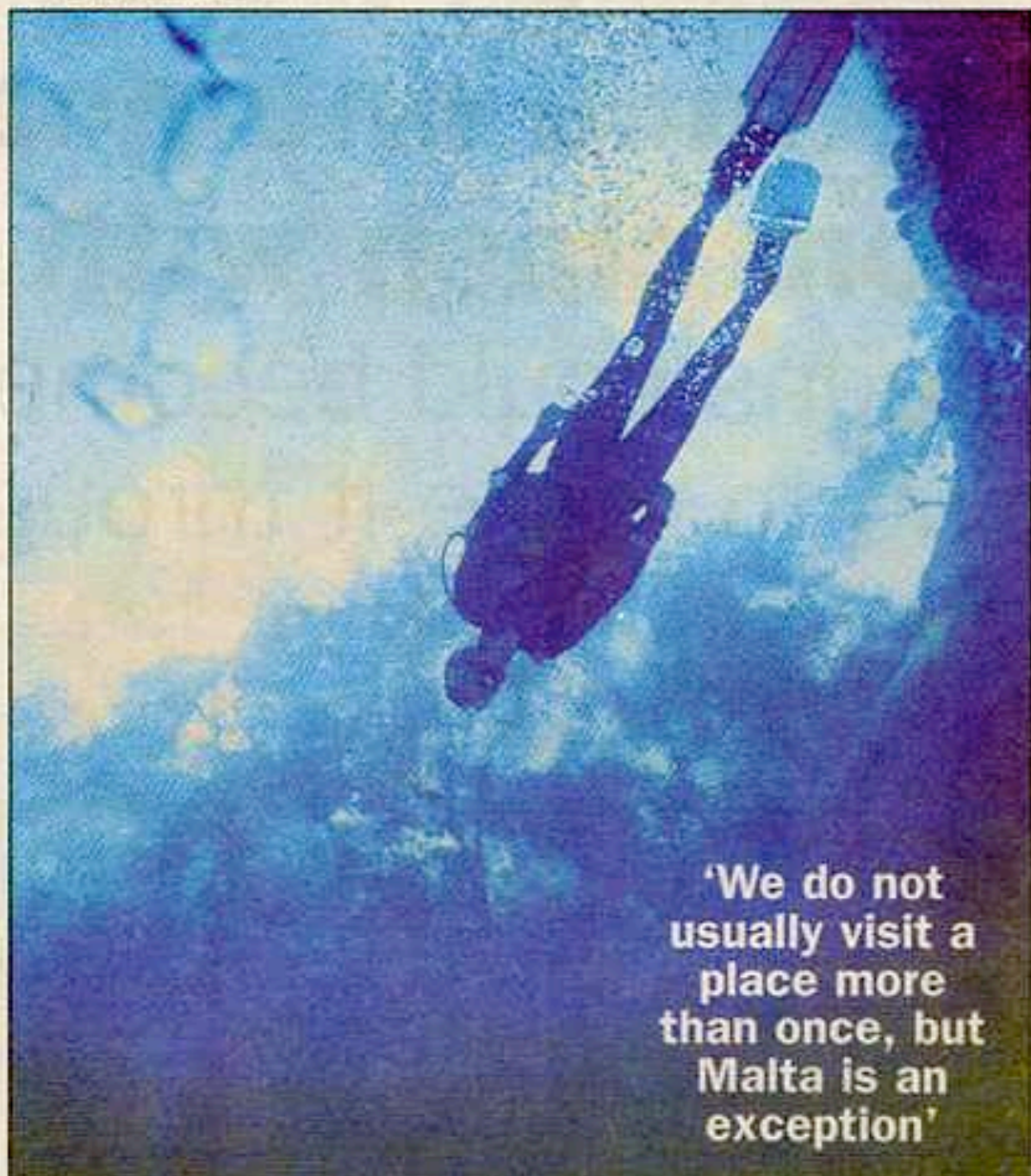
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'We do not usually visit a place more than once, but Malta is an exception'

'Oceans of Mystery' highlights Malta's underwater treasures

By Adriana Cacciottolo

The long debate on the sensitive and complex issue of the preservation of Malta's rich heritage sites has so far ignored one important aspect – underwater historical treasures. Malta's role as a stage for numerous sea battles over the centuries has turned the sea around the islands into a veritable graveyard as several vessels succumbed to the ravages of war or the onslaught of natural elements to their final resting place on the seabed.

Two episodes of the acclaimed underwater documentary series *Oceans of Mystery* currently being filmed in Malta, will highlight the importance of treating shipwrecks with due respect as a grave-site, advocating a strict "hands-off" policy in a bid to preserve the vessels intact for posterity.

Speaking to *The Malta Independent on Sunday* in a break from the hectic filming schedule, the president of the Canadian film company Eco-Nova Multimedia Productions Ltd, Rick Haupt, stressed the importance of protecting shipwrecks and teaching divers not to take anything out of the vessels. "There have been certain occasions where



HISTORICAL SITE: Rick Haupt during the filming of a shipwrecked Spanish galleon in Haiti in May
Photo by Robert Guertin

shipwrecks, but one has to differentiate between a historically relevant shipwreck and one which becomes an artificial reef

two episodes on Malta currently being filmed are expected to be ready for delivery by the end of the year.

a wonderful shipwreck. This is now a tourist attraction," Mr Haupt said.

One of the past episodes featured a close familial link between Malta and Eco-Nova's president. "My father-in-law, an RAF pilot in World War II stopped in Malta on his way to Morocco. A fresh crew took over his plane and flew off together with three other aircraft, never to be seen again. They were shot down in the Mediterranean, luckily my father-in-law, who still has fond memories of Malta, was not on board."

Following his last research on wrecks off Malta, Mr Haupt came across the fascinating but sad stories of the mine sweepers in World War II. The story of the mine sweepers and the tragic end of their crew will be told by focusing on two wrecks, the *Eddy* and the *HMS Olympus*. The other episode will feature the Huntclass destroyer *HMS Southwold* and its crew.

"In future we'd love to do an episode on more ancient wrecks. We are looking for Roman and Phoenician wrecks in the Mediterranean," Mr Haupt said.

Filming, with the assistance of the AFM's air and sea squadron, started on Friday with